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## Mennonite women in India

This issue of *Report* turns toward India, an Asian country that has been home to numerous North American Mennonite women during the century just passed. Through the years, other North American women wrote to their friends in the subcontinent, read articles in church journals about their activities, or tried to imagine the complex land and its culture. All of these women found that a sense of being supported helped in times of transition or when the poignancy of distance loomed large.

North Americans who attended the 1997 Mennonite World Conference in Calcutta formed short-term impressions. Those impressions differed dramatically from early missionary prospects. Living conditions, products, geography, transportation and population all shape views of a region. Ever since the three largest groups of North American Mennonites first sent members to share their faith with Indians, women's views of events, mission issues, friendships and the constancy of change have mattered.

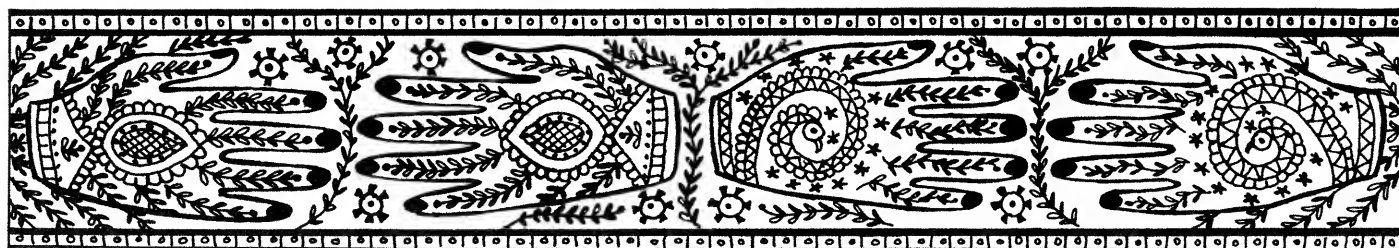
This review of Mennonite women in India began from a broader base. Christians knew of a major famine in India from 1896–99. They also felt called to share God's good news. The first Mennonites (Mennonite Brethren or MBs) to serve in India went from Russia with the Baptist Mission Society in 1889. The first MBs from America arrived 10 years later in 1899 (to Andhra Pradesh state, membership now 75,000). That same year the Mennonite Church (MCs, now 3,500) began its work in what is now Madhya Pradesh. General Conference Mennonites (GCs, now 6,500) began their work in another part of Madhya Pradesh in 1900. (Current data, 5th General Assembly of Asia Mennonite Conference, 1998.)

The broader Mennonite family in India—Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India (MCSFI)—has about 90,000 members of which 80 percent are MB. The total membership includes Brethren in Christ (BIC, 2000) whose work in Bihar state began in 1914 and United Missionary Church (UMC, 1500) with beginnings in 1925 in Bihar and in 1956 in West Bengal. Starting in 1940, MCs also located in Bihar (1000). Missionary children from these locations attended international schools: Mt. Hermon, Woodstock or Kodaikanal. The first Asia Mennonite Conference took place in 1971, and the first All-India Mennonite Women's Conference followed in 1977, both in Dhamtari (MC Sundarganj church).

A century of crossing cultures, with relationships both wise and otherwise, now lies behind us. Currently, only MCC, active in India for 50 years, sponsors Mennonites from North America. A few Mennonites are school staff at Woodstock and Kodaikanal, and on occasion someone serves short-term at Union Biblical Seminary at Pune.

Germane to discussion within any denomination is the truth that "mission" is God's. Particulars of Protestant groupings, such as Mennonite branches, can get in the way of sharing God's universal love and justice. In 1909 J. N. Kaufman asked *Gospel Herald* readers: Why three Mennonite missions in India? Why not unite, based on God's word? "What a blessing if . . . people could spend all their energy [growing] in Christ" (All MC/Gospel Herald quotes in this article appeared in 1909 or 1949).

Differences among Mennonites of expressed piety, baptism modes and women's submission to men were not left on Western shores. Other North American denominations also transplanted the divide between evangelism and social uplift as mission. And missionaries "on location" struggled with their governing boards and constituencies over issues involving enough conversions or abrupt changes in leader-



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ship due to harsh judgments. I wish women (Indian and Western) were free to verbalize their deep joy mixed with pain, especially as a new century begins.

A drive to teach others, rooted in the great commission, has rarely been balanced with motivation to learn as much from those whose religious loyalty differs. Mennonites working in India need to understand *advaita*, God as One and Many, as surely as to tell about baptism. We become more faithful as we absorb, rather than counter, others' truth. Being impelled to "love the neighbor as the self" without bounds will lead to reconciliation, friendship and advocacy for people on the margins—earmarks of God's mission. The call for changes in approach for the next century need not lead workers of the past to feel betrayed.

Rather than denounce or block out a person's religious heritage, creative ways to retain meaningful practices along with new loyalties are possible. For example in 1912, 50 people from the Champa (GC) church began a 25-mile pilgrimage the day after Christmas. Pilgrimage being an important ritual for Hindus was thus endorsed; the Christians adapted the sacred event by singing en route. Singing and acting are important to many Indians. I spoke on themes of peace in six sessions of the Fifth All-India Mennonite Women's Conference in 1998. I noticed that the women came to life most during their late evening skits, acting and laughing with abandon.

Indian Bible women were integral to church and village life. Viola Wiebe details their tasks: teaching vacation Bible school, visiting homes, assisting the ill, conducting village women's meetings and advising women about their rights and legal status. "If a preacher was away, a Bible woman led the service." Shiromano Bai kept records for Florence Nafziger and talked with patients about God. Ghirja Bai helped her own mother to claim Christ.

Organized activities followed. Anna Stalter reports a scene from 1909 when on tour. Several Bible women and a few missionaries spent several weeks moving and living among different villages within a 10-mile radius. Anna noted the interplay of faiths as she observed "an old Hindu woman who sat in front, counting her beads and saying, 'Ram, Ram,' before joining in the Christian songs." Viola Wiebe further organized women when she initiated a Women's Association of MBs from nine locations "to challenge each other and have spiritual discussions . . . Many of the

Indian women were eloquent speakers and teachers but had little opportunity to express themselves."

A few quotes reflect on MCSFI church issues related to leadership:

- When asked if she, the wife of an MC missionary, could baptize a woman, the wife said, "I never baptized anyone. But my husband gladly will." To which the Muslim woman, aware of social-religious limits, replied, "Oh, but I can't see him; my husband would [retaliate]."
- "In India, single women [19 among GC missionaries] found that they could do anything a man could do when it came to administration, preaching, teaching, and healing, and they were probably better at delivering babies" (Unrau).
- "Too few pastors have received too little training resulting in too little sense of preparing for the next generation" (John Friesen).

A century of experience rarely bogs down from routine. Although certain regions survived several famines, production of basic grains and edible oils made great strides. The Depression caused a lack of income from lost jobs, increasing poverty. Independence from Britain in 1947 instilled nationalism and dreams of a "new India," but Partition's nightmare of communal strife remains hard to bury. Separating dominant religions in Pakistan and India was little solution, much as the Christian divisions in Ireland persist. Now, having reached one billion people, "Population growth will kill India," a reporter recently concluded.

A sampling of reflections from Western missionaries include:

- In Korba people remember floods of 1920 and 1961, while the discovery of coal there (1955) left deep impressions. "To learn to share 'our church' (due to the influx of Christians from elsewhere in India) has not been easy" (*Fellowship in the Gospel*).
- "Natives judge a missionary's efficiency by the ability to speak the language" (Mary Burkhard).
- Esther Vogt met a slithering intruder on her windowsill. She lived to thank God. Three snake charmers caught 55 at the Ramapatnam Seminary (*Septia Prints*).
- "People are ready to change their faith, not their caste" (D. J. Arthur).

**"We become more faithful  
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- In an interesting booklet from 1926, Martha Burkhalter reported in verse form about a weeklong trip with S.T. and Metta Moyer. She titled her 1200 lines of verse "A Fragment of Missionary Life." Near the end, she proclaims: "From among the high and lowly/God is calling out His people,/From all nations, tongues and climates/Will the Church of Christ be gathered."

- Encounters with Hindu and Muslim neighbors were daily, vital as drinking water. While Paul Hiebert and Paul Wiebe are respectively a noted anthropologist and a sociologist, no Mennonite missionaries became notable authorities on Hindu religion (say historian Juhnke and administrator Shenk). An attempt to be fair toward Hinduism could be "tinged with condescension." While Anne Ediger (1969) observed, "It takes time for Hindus to change their convictions," would the critique not be true of Christians as well? Nurse Viola Wiebe made sensitive observations, "Certain days were not 'auspicious' for [Hindu] patients to be discharged. . . . Strict Muslim patients would not take a mouthful of water with their pills or medication before sundown during *Ramadan*." She observed that many visitors to India "were critical of Indian behavior and culture without trying to understand it."

From such details that shape Western perceptions of India, might new foci be welcome? Perhaps, women will take stronger initiative in planning for Mennonite global bonding for the new century, especially as GC and MC segments of the Mennonite community merge. Perhaps, men will join the feminist foci on friendship that enables, on authority of purpose rather than position, and on God's mission that invites as it breaks down barriers and welcomes plurality. The first women's mission society, established in 1800 in Boston, preceded William Carey's first baptism in India by two months. Might we radically renew our engagement with India, beginning in 2000?

I first recommend immersion in reading what Indian Christians are writing, authors like K. P. Aleaz, Aruna Gnanadason and K. C. Abraham. A posture of listening is imperative—to their perspectives on ecumenism, colonial baggage and conversion; to their quest for relevance for India's urban and rural church; to their equating evangelism with struggling for the liberation of victims. Aruna Gnanadason's word about evangelism activates good news. She sees the two-fold task as: "to experience solidarity with people of all faiths by witnessing to the spiri-

tuality common to all religions and to reveal Christian uniqueness by proclaiming Jesus as the 'Pact' that God makes with those who are vulnerable in our world" (NCC Review, March 1999).

Further points for North Americans to comprehend before we convey faith in India appear. Attention to the causes of injustice toward *dalits* (outcaste people formerly called untouchables) and promoting a caste-free church mark Indian Christian discussions of mission. Also central are alternatives to hierarchy and new meanings for unity within diversity. Alternatives will enable convincing interdependence between laity and leaders, women and men, and across economic divides. They emphasize personal authority for each Indian, rather than dependency. They promote strength as a minority within India's religious pluralism through increased cooperation with other denominations. I also value K. P. Aleaz's steps in Indian Christian mission: to ask forgiveness for damage we have caused through unfair judgments of local religions and cultures; to affirm liberation elements in Extra-Christian faiths; and to credit the contributions of other religions to Christianity and to our one God's single mission (NCC Review, November and December, 1995). Missioning must wear a new face in the century ahead. Are we preparing to see and practice it differently?

To review the past is part of the process, so read on. Unfortunately, space does not permit naming each woman missionary. Major MB histories have or soon will be written. Valid voices report; few declined the offer. Others will wish to have reflected; many have died. Four Indians and three former "mish kids" write; several language areas and portraits of specific women appear among the articles. An annotated bibliography offers further information. Writers provide traditional views as well as new vision. They take a stand, rejoice, re-live, hope and confess. They deal with crossing cultures, with being honest. They invite readers to listen in, although to gather in a forum and sip *chai* would be preferred.

—Dorothy Yoder Nyce, compiler

**A writer and teacher, Dorothy Yoder Nyce, Goshen, Ind., first served in India from 1962–65 as Woodstock staff. She has returned for six short assignments, the last for seven months in 1998 with a Lutheran seminary in Chennai (Madras). Her 1997 D.Min. thesis, *Dialogues to Foster Interreligious Understanding*, integrates issues from India.**

**"Both the Bible women and seminary-trained women strengthened awareness, and other women saw participation in church ministry as worthy."**

by Rachel Bagh

## **Mennonite women and mission: Status and role**

I am grateful for this opportunity to write briefly about General Conference Mennonite Women in India, to increase the attention given to women of the GC mission. North American readers first need to understand how prevalent patriarchy is in India. The social-religious status and role entitled to many Indian women has been dehumanizing—property of a husband and near-slave in the home who is responsible for child bearing, household work and giving pleasure to her husband.

History, however, reveals that Indian women did enjoy a respectful position in society along with men during the Vedic age 1500–900 BCE (Kenneth E. Gill, *Count Us Equals*). During that time, some girls were initiated into the study of religious books, and some women engaged in deep philosophical discussions. Given choice in marriage, a measure of equality existed for partners, but freedoms were lost and conditions for women deteriorated over the centuries. Into that situation, GC missionaries arrived in the eastern, rural part of the large state of Madhya Pradesh in 1900. Various ministries of the mission brought major change.

### **Educational Ministry**

Young women educated in the mission schools returned to serve in them as teachers or principals after pursuing higher education elsewhere. They held good positions, combined with wife and mother roles, and received respect and status in church and society. The girls' hostels and orphanages uplifted women, educating them for life and training them to serve the church. Bible schools had a positive influence on women of the GC mission. Senior pastors' wives and missionary women taught the wives of new pastors, those training at the Bible School. They learned about sewing, cooking and health care in addition to biblical content. These women gained self-confidence and self-respect; they understood their worth as part of the church's ministry. In turn they initiated similar changes among women with whom they ministered in local villages.

### **Bible Women**

Bible women offered important ministry during early Mennonite mission work. Pastors' wives and missionary women accompanied men in evangelistic efforts. They taught Christian songs and Bible stories along with health and hygiene. They preached the gospel to Hindu and Christian women. Later in the 1960s and 1970s, young women were sent to Bible schools and seminaries for theological studies. Both the Bible women and seminary-trained women strengthened awareness, and other women saw participation in church ministry as worthy.

### **Women's Department and Asha Handicrafts Center**

After GC churches opened a women's department, the status of women rose. While young girls benefitted through Sunday schools and camps, the Asha Handicrafts Center worked mainly among the unemployed and uneducated women of the church. These girls and women learned handicrafts and cooking as they earned for themselves. Bible study, daily devotions and singing created a sense of self-worth in their lives. Their roles expanded from the four walls of the home to church and society. Ministry through medicine further raised women's status. While few women were encouraged by the mission to be doctors, many went to mission hospitals for nurses' training. They reshaped hospital life.

At present Indian women experience great change. Competitive in many areas, they are members of Parliament and scholars in research institutes. Women in the social-religious sphere can be considered as Devi, a Hindu goddess. But in home life, many women suffer. Dowry deaths reveal the depth of religious tradition.

GC missionary activities have helped women toward leadership, in the church and beyond. Many enjoy status as teachers or through medical or government service. The Mennonite heritage also validates efficiency in the home—as mother, wife and daughter-in-law. By bringing change, the GC mission endeavor gave Indian women in the church a distinct identity. Active in church ministries and commitments, these women now organize their own conferences. Once every five years, all Mennonite women gather for a time of fellowship, to enhance love and unity.

**Rachel Bagh completed her M.Th. and serves as a faculty member and hostel supervisor for single women at the Allahabad Bible Seminary, Uttar Pradesh.**

by Thelma Miller Groff

## Glimpses of God's work

Not every family has three generations of its women live segments of their lives in a land other than that of the family's origin. This has been the good fortune of my family, and the land of choice was India. My mother, Ruth Blosser, and her husband, Ernest E. Miller, lived in Dhamtari, Madhya Pradesh, from 1919 to 1937. They returned for two one-year stints at Woodstock School in northern India. My husband, Weyburn, and I lived in Dhamtari and in Yeotmal, Maharashtra, from 1946–64. Our daughter, Cheryl Groff, and her husband, Ron Hess, lived in Delhi and Benares as students in 1976. They returned as documentary filmmakers to four states in India for sojourns of three to six months each in the 1970s and 1980s. Both Cheryl and I spent our girlhood years in India: she until age 11 and I until 14.

As you read on, you will notice the differences in our cross-cultural experiences. The milieus of the USAs from which we each came and the Indias to which we went differed.

Mother's college experience had been liberating and service-oriented. Her husband had recently returned from two years of World War I relief work, caring for Turkish orphan boys. Called to enlarge Christ's kingdom through Bible teaching and hospitality and perhaps to prod leaders toward reform, Mother entered India under the British Raj. That India welcomed Western thinking and education. Mother felt positive about being a missionary, and the Indian community affirmed her. She thoroughly enjoyed teaching Bible in the high school and with a large Sunday school class of women. Having started a well-baby clinic, she felt enthused by the town's active participation.



**"The milieus of the USAs from which we each came and the Indias to which we went differed."**

Gifted with hospitality, Mother happily welcomed humble folk and people of influence to her home and table. She had a routine of inviting students for dinner just prior to their writing exams. During this time of intense pressure, they could relax with an evening of games, piano and the radio.

Here is an excerpt from her diary entry on October 11, 1937, the day that she and her family left India after 18 years of service: "... after breakfast with Grabers, many teachers and friends [gave] us good-bye. Ernest and I shook hands all around and then [left] with Kings. At the gate the

Mohammedans gave us garlands of flowers. As we drove past the school and hostel, the boys stopped us and showered us with puffed rice and petals. It was difficult to break away!!! We love them and our work . . . In Wardha, Gandhi's secretary and his [assistant], Shanti Bai, came to meet us at the train. In Akola we met the deSilvas who took Topsy, our dog . . . I wept in pity for the children. Breaking up our home in India has been difficult. We fell asleep in our third class bunks."

In contrast to Mother, I experienced a more evangelical thrust at college and a more conservative U.S. Mennonite Church. I felt called to win followers for Christ. I returned as an adult to an India newly independent, eager for self-government. The church in this new India was awakening to being indigenous. I resonated with the rightness of that goal and wholeheartedly rejoiced with believers. How to live out the vision—for Indian Christians to win and make disciples for Christ—became the challenge.

I contributed through teaching and enabling Indians who knew the call. For three years, I adapted Herald Press curriculum materials for use in MC Sunday schools. Working with an Indian translator and artist was rewarding. I also taught at the Yeotmal Seminary—classes in Family and in Hindi language for students from Assam and South India. As director of both English and Hindi choirs, I was excited to work with *tabla* and harmonium accompaniments. I'll always remember our surprise and pleasure when the local college asked our choir to teach it our arrangement of the Indian national anthem, "Jana, Gana, Mana."

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**"Yashoda wrestled with anger at the injustice young girls and women received."**

Weyburn and I also knew the importance of hospitality, and the seminary students knew that our home was open to them every afternoon during after-class free time. For awhile, we invited small groups of students for breakfast. One Saturday morning, several students surprised us, "Oh, did you forget that you invited us for breakfast today?"

Our daughter, Cheryl, grew to maturity in the U.S. in the 1970s. During the Vietnam War, she joined a peace march in Washington, D.C., and felt committed to improve life for all, without prejudice. She returned to an India 20 years into successful self-rule, proud of its nationhood. Mutual respect and genuine caring were lodestars for her.

When she returned as an adult student, an Indian family shared their home in New Delhi. Gopal, an author and publisher, and Jalabala, an actress in classical drama, managed a small, renowned theater. Jalabala's mother, Madge Vaidya, lived with them. Gopal taught Cheryl useful principles for writing scripts for documentary films.

Cheryl and Madge reconnected later when Madge came to New York. Since Madge had never seen the U.S. hinterland, she accepted Cheryl's invitation to visit us in the Midwest. A beautiful person, Madge was as open and warm toward our small group from church as they were toward her. Later I asked Cheryl, "Are genuine, cross-cultural friendships possible?" She replied, "Yes, I think so. Unequivocally!"

Looking back, I observe how love thrives over the generations. Though different, each of our cross-cultural experiences reveals love. "Wherever love lives, it is God giving birth," says Maria Teresa Winters. Our trust that God works in the hearts and lives of men and women everywhere is not disappointed!

**For Thelma Miller Groff, spiritual directing has been life-giving. Now retired, she served as an elementary teacher in Goshen for 12 years, a counselor at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary for four years, and co-leader of retreats with her husband, Weyburn, for 10 years.**



by Cynthia Peacock

## Sunshine through the clouds

Ten years ago on a cold, winter night, a group of 50—children and a few women outnumbered by men—gathered under a village's spreading banyan tree in a remote part of Bihar state. Illiterate and without facilities for health, irrigation, drinking water or adequate food, absolute hopelessness marked their faces. For two hours, five of us MCC development workers heard the men describe their woeful plight, their oppression from landlords.

We reminded this group of caste-ridden people that Fate did not master their lives. They could, if they chose, take control, and their lives could reflect beauty, meaning and fruitfulness. We gently explained how they allowed themselves to be exploited and that their abject poverty could be addressed. But, our purpose—to meet and talk with women—had failed because they sat on the fringe, their heads covered by the sari *pallu*, their eyes lowered.

The following day as we toured the village, I noticed a young woman sitting in front of her mud hut. I started talking with Yashoda. Eagerly, she confided that she was an only child, and that her parents worked in the field of a landlord during the cropping season. They coped for half a year on those earnings. For the rest of the year, her father had to work as a laborer in other places while she and her mother struggled as domestic helpers in the landlord's household.

Since the village school trained only high-caste children, low-caste Yashoda became friendly with a high caste girl who taught her to read and write. Barely 12 and haunted by hunger and poverty, she often dreamed of starting a school for low-caste children. She wrestled with anger at the injustice young girls and women received. She saw girls her age married off to 40-year-old men with a dowry of goats, cows and utensils. If widowed at a young age, they were sent back to their parents. If unable to produce children, some were discarded by their husbands. With the girl always blamed, Yashoda became a disillusioned young woman without hope.



**"Tirelessly, Yashoda sustained and kept the women together, despite opposition from high-caste neighbors and moneylenders whose selfish interests were defied."**

Hearing her story, I asked Yashoda if she would call village women together to talk about their problems. She readily agreed. Later I learned that she was a Christian. The next day, 10 to 12 women met under the same banyan tree. Their demeanor brightened despite their emaciated bodies clad in dirty, torn saris; their dry hair turned brown due to lack of oil and being malnourished; and their sunken, lowered eyes. While Yashoda introduced me, they sat quietly, their heads covered.

After a few questions, they began responding. Trusting my friendship, they began to understand that together we could find solutions. They received my comments that a loving God created us with wisdom, strength and knowledge. They shared and learned to enjoy life. They united to bring about more peace and justice in society.

We met often over the years. The women asked many questions. They saw how slow, steady teamwork could overcome social evils. We talked about values and morals, precious jewels to God. We built trust and countered evil forces. Soon, women from ten villages gathered to share community problems, supported by their menfolk. They collected small amounts of money that Yashoda saved. Trained for leadership and community organization, she claimed her role as a Christian development worker.

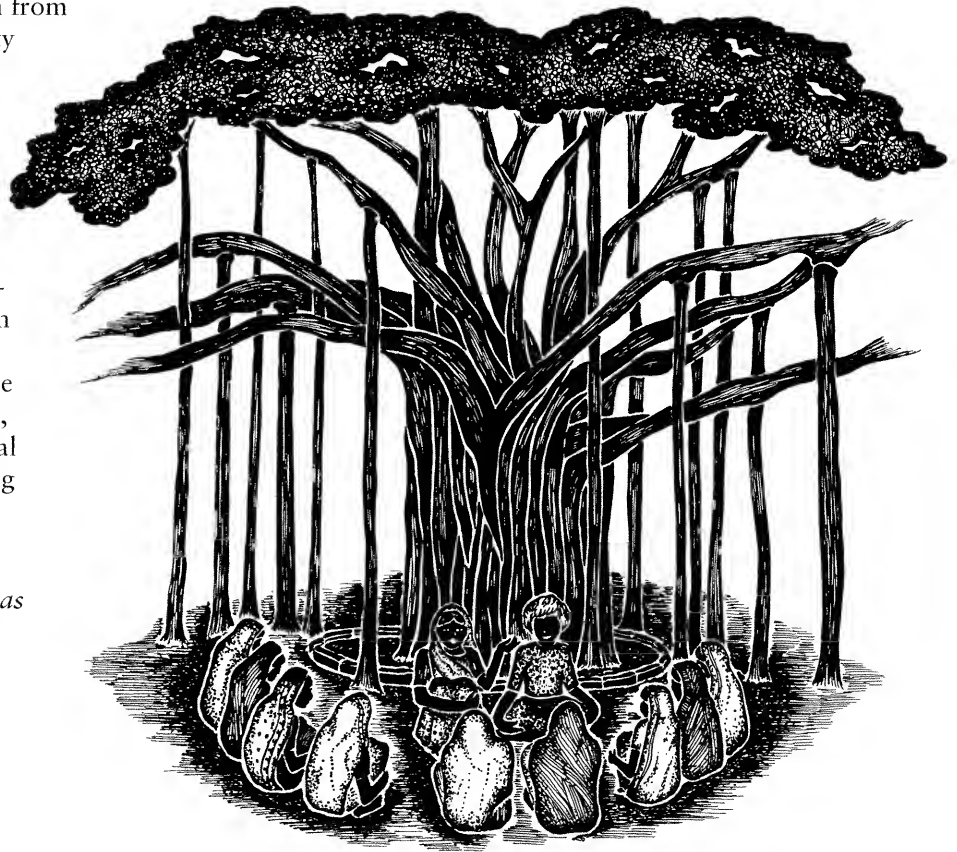
Yashoda's dream became a reality. Tirelessly, she sustained and kept the women together, despite opposition from high-caste neighbors and moneylenders whose selfish interests were defied. At long last, Yashoda said, "The sun decided to reveal its glowing face through the disappearing dark clouds."

Ten years have passed since Yashoda's friends formed *Panch Ratna Mahila Vikas* Trust (Five Gem Women Development). From low-caste communities, these 14 women believe that they are as precious

as gems. Still branded untouchables, they work together to build communities of harmony, justice and peace. Yashoda's leadership and dreams converge in a new school that serves many children and provides adult literacy classes for destitute women. The *Panch Ratna Mahila Vikas* Trust functions as a model for other villages.

I was privileged to share in the birthing of this Trust. God's work brings value, self-respect and dignity to abject lives. This being only one instance of Christians working with other religious and ethnic groups, opportunity to share the good news—to build islands of hope—does exist in India. Christians contribute through Incarnation, Involvement and Interdependence.

**Cynthia Peacock, a social worker with MCC for 31 years, organizes village women's groups near Calcutta and in neighboring states. A member of the United Missionary Church, she joins MCC's partner organizations to empower women.**



**"I feel closest to belonging when I'm with a group of 'global nomads,' others whose journeys are similar to mine."**

by Lynette Beachy Bauman

## The view from here

When I think of my India experience, I feel caught in a web of East and West. Author David C. Pollock names this web "third culture." Those of us caught in it are "third-culture kids." I've discovered, in return visits to India, that the subtle ground rules of the Indian culture and the third culture represented at Woodstock School [international boarding school in the foothills of the Himalayas] are more innate for me than the ground rules of Western culture.

Born into this maze of cultures surrounded with the richness of India, I grew up in a Western home. As a young child, before beginning school at Woodstock, I played with Indian children, my best friends. Our *ayah*, Esther, provided supervision for my younger brother and me. Those carefree years left the differences of East and West sheltered within a safe environment.

Entering boarding school—a rite of passage—marked the end of childhood as I knew it. Constantly surrounded by peers, I found comfort in time spent with Gracie, the dorm *ayah*. I felt that she enjoyed my company as much

as I enjoyed hers. She washed my hair, trimmed my nails and brushed off the gravel when I fell and hurt myself.

As I reached puberty, my world changed more dramatically. While on United States furlough, I discovered how vastly different my life had been from that of classmates and friends here. Much as I enjoyed such Western luxuries as lemon meringue pie, Zest soap and our local dime store, I longed to return to the familiar. On returning to India, I found that my world there had also changed. I began to ask, "Where did I belong?"

Over time, the aloneness that I felt as a young adult has lessened. However, I feel closest to belonging when I'm with a group of "global nomads," others whose journeys are similar to mine.

My husband, our two daughters and I lived in the Woodstock community from 1986-1989. Upon our arrival in New Delhi, Eric Roberts, an Indian national and Woodstock School's liaison officer, and his wife, Monica, met us. We traveled by taxi through the night, reaching Woodstock as the Islamic *muezzin* called for morning prayers. During that ride, I was drawn into a friendship with Monica. That deepening bridge of friendship invited me into an India both new and familiar.

I particularly remember a day that we walked to Happy Valley, a nearby settlement of Tibetans. Over a meal of *Mo-mos* and Tibetan noodles, we talked of our families and shared personal hopes and dreams. From Monica I learned how to make *chai*, peel ginger root, roll delicious *chapatis* and face the more subtle nuances of speaking Hindi while shopping in the bazaar.

Monica's two dogs, Bhotu and Misery, often accompanied her, and from the beginning they captured my heart. I didn't think I could ever be happier! When Monica and Eric moved to a house more distant from ours, we saw less of each other. Her work in a school residence kept her busy, and without the luxury of personal telephones, we drifted apart. Although we still keep in touch, I grieve the loss of that close friendship.

I feel blessed to have glimpsed and experienced an India I could love.

Employed part-time in the Goshen Public Library, Lynette Beachy Bauman volunteers with her congregation's worship team. She is an avid reader and has published several poems.





by Esther Kniss

## A fragrant life

I often remember Khekhel, a beautiful woman in the Bihar Mennonite Church. Her husband, Masih Das, now a retired pastor, has Parkinson's disease. Though in their 60s, they both have lots of energy. Hard workers on their small plot of land, they are respected for their humble spirit of service and their concern for others.

Masih Das was single when he started working for the Mennonite (MC) mission. One day he brought a letter from Khekhel to my husband. He bashfully told Paul that Khekhel had written to say that she wanted to marry him and had asked her parents to arrange their marriage.

"Do you like her?" Paul asked.

With a smile, he said, "Yes. She's a good girl and is pretty."

Khekhel always made vital contributions to the church-wide women's retreats. I remember her walking from the bus to the campground, bringing several women from her area with her. Khekhel often led the singing. In particular I remember the words of one song: "Masihi Jeewan Sugandhit Jeewan [Christian life, fragrant life, scatter the fragrance in all the world]." Khekhel certainly did just that in her corner of the world.

During one retreat session, Khekhel told of God's help through some trials. Their house had been burglarized, and all their money and recently harvested grain were stolen. They had enough for only one meal when they learned that a guest was coming. What would they do? She told how miraculously they all had enough to eat, relating her story with great joy and thankfulness.



"I remember Khekhel for her lilting laughter, her hospitality and hard work."

In her village of Bathet, Khekhel is respected not only among Christians, but also among Hindus and Tribals. An underground, parallel government has recently been managed by Marxist terrorists in Bathet. They have their own courts to carry out sentences on the rich and corrupt, without mercy. Outsiders do not dare to enter the village. But officials told Khekhel that she is welcome any time. They said they would protect Khekhel and her husband if ever again they experienced danger. Khekhel said, "God is our help—we don't want violence."

I remember Khekhel for her lilting laughter, her hospitality and hard work, her pleasing voice and her concern for those in trouble—whiffs of fragrance.

After 43 years of service in India, Esther Kniss "retired." For the past five years, she and Paul have returned to India during the winter months to assist the United Missionary Church in West Bengal. Currently, they are in Trinidad for one year, sent by the Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions.

**"My dream for my church and its people is this—that the Mennonite church will become a 'Beacon of Hope, Love and Solace' for all people."**

by Esther Kunjam

## Vision for Indian Mennonite women

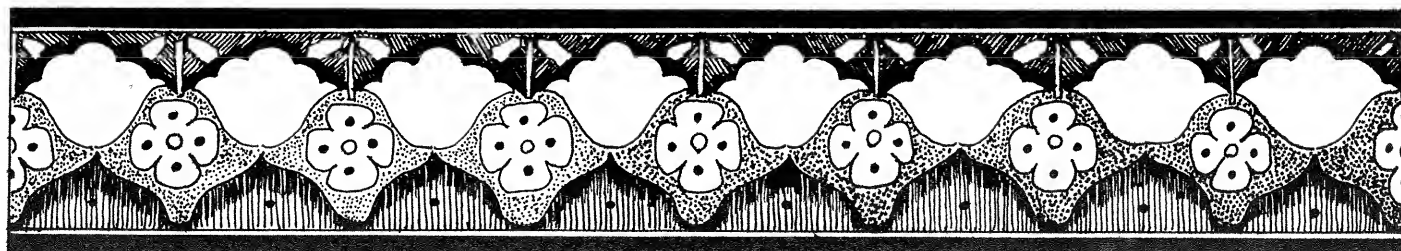
The Mennonite Church in India (MCI) started in 1899 when Mrs. Alice Page arrived along with two men and a child. The role of women in MCI has not significantly improved over the century. Women still primarily support men in their church ministry. Women take care of the church's children, feeding them the milk of God's Word and nurturing them in the Christian faith. As a leader among Mennonite women in India, I wish to promote the following steps within our churches.

1. Encourage girls and enable more young women to engage in theological training in order to take general leadership roles in the church. The goal is not to compete with men but to supplement the total ministry of the church.
2. Encourage Christian family life and commitment. This aspect of Christian ministry has diminished because of television with its several-dozen channels. We wish to promote home visitations and conduct Christian family seminars and retreats.
3. Encourage peace and harmony in the churches. Disharmony and divisions take place in church because so much power politics prevails. We women will not take sides in these games of power politics. Rather, we will confront the leaders to be more understanding and to humbly accept one another.

4. Reach out to others, especially women outside the church circle, with Jesus' love and concern. To arrange fellowship meetings with women of other religions and to develop friendships with them will be important.
5. Take a leading role in confronting social menaces like alcoholism, drug addiction and vulgar programs on television. This we will do by meeting with our young people and their friends to talk about and undermine these menaces.
6. Find new ways to take care of people who are elderly, people with disabilities, and people who are needy and suffering in our churches and society.
7. Encourage young people to commit their lives to doing what is right and good for others.

In conclusion, my dream for my church and its people is this—that the Mennonite church will become a "Beacon of Hope, Love and Solace" for all people.

**Esther Kunjam, Rajnandgaon, Madhya Pradesh, is the mother of four young women and is a teacher by profession. She currently serves as president of the MCI Women's Fellowship and as secretary of the All-India Mennonite Women's Conference.**



**"India gifted me with a hunger for wide horizons—an understanding of how wide our human family is and a spiritual commitment that goes beyond success and personal security."**

by Helen Blosser

## Ministry with orphan girls

During central India's 1920s famine, missionaries of the former Hepzibah Faith Mission brought homeless children to a new orphanage at their station in West Bengal. When John and I arrived in 1945, only a few teenage orphan girls remained at the boarding school. We supervised their education and training and arranged for their marriages. Our joy as guardians, aunt and uncle, and grandparents of their children grew as they matured into successful teachers, nurses, pastors' wives, Christian workers and mothers.

We soon learned about Indian culture, including the custom of arranged marriage. An arranged marriage was often a beautiful experience. When a family came to secure a bride for its son, the prospective young woman served tea to them. If the young man expressed interest in the girl, she chose whether to accept or reject him. If she accepted, plans for the engagement and wedding followed. We have known many happy arranged marriages.

Most former orphans married and raised families within our local churches. To work with them in building the Indian church gave us great joy. Through Vacation Bible schools, youth activities, adult retreats, camps and conferences, these young people grew in their faith.

Opening a new station near our village churches, we too learned by reaching out to needs. For example, when our medicines worked effectively for malaria, dysentery and other common human ailments, villagers even bought some for their sick cows. Along with Bible courses, we taught practical first aid and basic habits of hygiene to prevent suffering. How graciously the village women invited our "Bible women" co-workers and us into their humble homes. They listened carefully as we shared God's word. Their dignity and sense of belonging inspired me.

**Active in the Missionary Church, USA, (also called United Missionary Society in India), Helen Blosser served in India from 1945–1973, in Sri Lanka from 1978–1984 and in Guam from 1990–1991. The last two assignments were with Trans World Radio. Now retired, Helen is active in her local church in Goshen, Ind.**

by Mary Kay Burkhalter Larson

## Gifts from India

India was my mother. Not only did I receive gifts from her that I can easily name, but there are also gifts that have remained hidden and will be discovered only by degrees over time—gifts that bear the mark of the experience that is India.

While writing this, I am attending a three-week workshop in Hawaii on Complex Humanitarian Emergencies. As a representative of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, I am at the workbench with 32 others from 12 countries preparing to respond to the next humanitarian disaster wherever it may occur. [The major earthquake in Turkey happened several weeks later.]

In some measure, India has brought me to this place. She gifted me with a hunger for wide horizons—an understanding of how wide our human family is and a spiritual commitment that goes beyond success and personal security. Using Hindi, I visit with an Indian doctor who leads the Thai Red Cross and a Nepalese midwife. I explain that I was taken, a babe in arms, to India on the *Queen Mary*.

I recognize two main influences from my years in India: 1) Strong, unconventional women in the mission context and 2) Indian culture and worldview. All around my childhood, a remarkable set of missionary women found freedom in the mission context unknown in their home country's church. They were women who had escaped Western expectations for their roles. In India's remote colonial setting, they tested their gifts and callings.

An early memory of my great-aunt Martha Burkhalter places her at our dining room table vigorously discussing mission policy and telling stories from teaching at the Bible school. Not only was she a college-educated, seminary-trained woman, rare enough for the time, but she was also teaching men. And more than that, she was a single mother of an adopted Indian daughter.

continued on page 12

**"I grew up thinking it quite normal to have a mother who went directly to top government officials to insist on receiving 20 additional bags of rice for the hospital during a drought."**

**"The Hindu philosophy of inclusiveness molded the culture."**

Other strong women encircled me. Dr. Ella Bauman practiced at one mission hospital, and Ann Penner gave administrative leadership to another mission hospital while writing nursing school curriculum. Helen Kornelson camped alone in villages even in the face of pervasive persecution of Christians in rural communities. My mother, Ramoth Burkhalter, brought commercial sex workers together to sew and find not only an alternative means of income but dignity and hope. Asha Handicrafts, the culmination of this work, shipped clothing and goods to neighboring towns and also to Bangladesh, changing women's lives as well as the economy of the village. I grew up thinking it quite normal to have a mother who went directly to top government officials to insist on receiving 20 additional bags of rice for the hospital during a drought. These missionary women ventured out on ground that their Mennonite sisters in North America would not pursue until much later.

Beyond the inspiration of mission women was an entire Indian culture with centuries of tradition—influences that were more hidden. In countless ways, I developed a "barefoot" worldview, unconscious of it until juxtaposed with typical Western patterns. In particular I experienced three areas of contrast—the importance of the community over the individual, the wideness of the family God has created, and the deep awareness of a spiritual dimension of life.

Community took precedence over individuals. In India the group routinely undertook decisions thought to be individual or personal in the West. From use of family planning techniques to decisions about baptism, the extended family formed views. Moreover, each person contributed through a specific role. A three- or four-year-old child swept the courtyard for the family. Though deaf and partially blind, an elder sat on the rope bed and provided security to the household. Every life added value to the larger community.

The Hindu philosophy of inclusiveness molded the culture. Diversity was expected within a community as long as people accepted their role or station in life. Differences were absorbed into the whole. This created difficulty for

early missionaries when Christ was seemingly absorbed into a pantheon of gods. Within the church, diversity became a sign of a new creation when a highly educated Brahmin and an illiterate outcaste could join together in worship. Even today, when faced with otherness, I simply expand my circle and expect that person to fulfill a distinct role in a way that I do not yet understand.

Indians, believers and unbelievers alike, maintain a strong sense of a reality other than what we physically touch, see or hear. They gifted those of us living there with an awareness of the spiritual realm that is as authentic as the material world and vastly more important. Communion with God and worship were primary. The outpouring of women as they passionately prayed in the temple courtyards, the ascetics in their loincloths wandering with beggars' bowls and fully dependent on the goodness of others, and peanut vendors chanting over the local scriptures, all these left their mark.

Even more stirring were the believers who combined the familiar Indian cultural forms with worship of the Christ. They used minor key, traditional melodies along with drums and offered hand-woven cloth, rice, and sweets in thanksgiving as worship. Possessed by no culture, their Lord felt (and feels) equally at home in all.

I recall an Indian evangelist, Chandrapillai, who visited our home; he had calluses on his knees from prayer. I think of the villager and his family who after baptism moved to the edge of the village; he could no longer share the same well with his Hindu brothers. Such was the strength of the Indian church, looking on the West and knowing its spiritual poverty.

As I scan health data from around the globe or plan with others for the struggle to win a greater measure of health for the forgotten and voiceless, faces of these figures from my childhood in India gather around me, urging greater faith and inspiring deeper commitment. They are gifts, indeed.

**Mary Kay Burkhalter Larson grew up in India. She, her husband and their three children served in Botswana with the GC Mennonite Church for 13 years. Earlier they were with MCC in Zaire. Her doctoral studies focused on population dynamics, and her current Centers for Disease Control position is with the division of reproductive health.**

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by Katherine E. Yutzy

## Professional partners

When I first worked as a nurse educator in India 30 years ago, the Mid-India Board asked that we provide health care to some villages near Dhamtari Christian Hospital. The students and I experienced a typical, early response of mistrust, even from medical and nursing staff at the hospital. People had survived for years without interference from a foreign woman, the villagers thought. But how could the village chief and counsel refuse a program of immunizations and physical exams that cost them nothing?

Agreement for a six-month trial period led to door-to-door assessment. With the villages nearby, the students and I walked and carried our bags of equipment. If possible, we treated the conditions faced—often skin lesions, scabies, etc. With midwifery students, we did prenatal checks and saw all postpartum mothers and newborn infants.

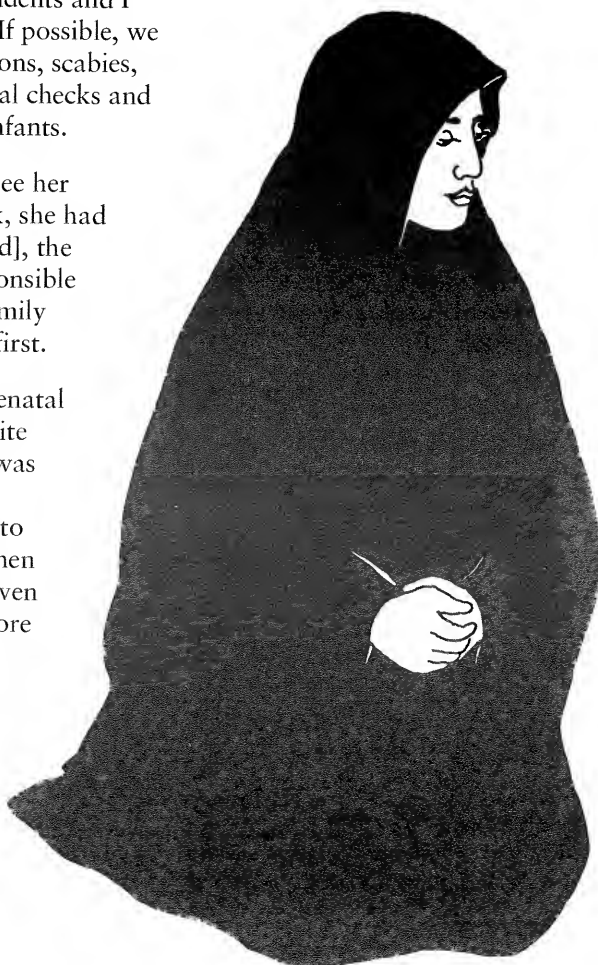
One morning a mother-in-law called us to see her pregnant daughter-in-law. For the last week, she had felt no fetal movement. Shushi [name altered], the wife of the youngest son and therefore responsible for most housework, was always the last family member to eat. She had to serve the others first.

With the mother-in-law at our elbows, a prenatal check revealed a faint fetal heart sound. Quite anemic, very pale and always tired, Shushi was referred to the hospital where she received proper treatment. She left with instructions to eat a balanced diet everyday. In due time when in her village, we learned that Shushi had given birth to a healthy male. Never did I see a more

grateful mother-in-law or family. This was “my son.” A fine occasion to testify to God’s love presented itself.

The mother-in-law became an advocate for all pregnant women in the village. Later, when floods required cholera injections, she urged everyone to participate. Seeing disease prevention and health promotion also helped nursing students to anticipate practical steps for their home villages. Yes, the foreigner and her students could help and were welcome.

**Katherine Yutzy arrived in India in 1965 and served for seven-and-a-half years. Late in 1999, she returned for her fifth short-term assignment. Originally from Ohio, she is retired after 18 years with the nursing faculty of Goshen College.**



**"We have had a lot of ups and downs in our church, but God has not forsaken the believers."**

by Kamolini Martin

## Personal mission

I offer a gift of encouragement to readers on the journey. I am from Sunderganj Mennonite Church in Dhamtari, India. My grandfather Pastor John Haider was a Muslim convert who led the Sunderganj church for many years with Bishop Edwin Weaver. My mother, from whom I learned a lot, came from a humble family of 12 children. My father, Mr. A. K. Biswas, a very straight and simple man with high values, was of course my hero! Parents have an everlasting influence on their children's lives.

I married Dr. H. S. Martin, a man dedicated to his call. We lived at the London Mennonite Center while he prepared for medical work and then served at Dhamtari Christian Hospital from 1953 to 1993, when he retired. As we together lived for others, our lives have been richly blessed.

In addition to parenting, I enjoyed full-time social work in Dhamtari. I also devoted myself to starting a school with all teaching done in English. Step by step, we added one grade each year. With the help of many in our community, my dream developed into a full-fledged school from preschool to twelfth grade. Children

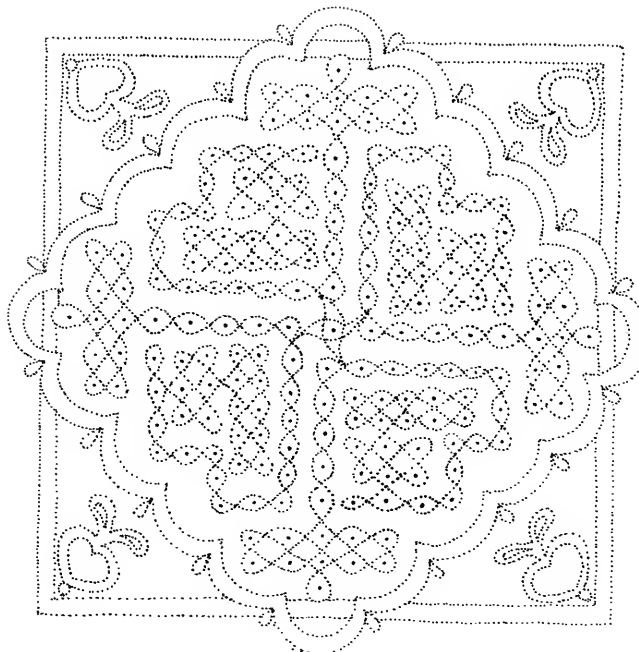
graduating from this school are equipped to continue their education anywhere in the world. This has been the greatest achievement of my life.

Honest living—to practice what we preach—is so important. We have had a lot of ups and downs in our church, but God has not forsaken the believers. Christ asks for a simple faith in him; God desires that we be happy and content. I feel that the women in our church have a great role to fill because we have more patience and tolerance for each other than men do.

Women can organize and settle things in more calm ways. Yet strong men are also needed. God made man and woman to supplement each other, not to override each other. If we live in harmony and love with our family, neighbors, friends and the world at large, we will overcome obstacles.

But our mission is also broader. We must love our Creator God who gave us this wonderful and happy life. After death, our spirits will return to God with whom we are ultimately accountable for our thoughts and deeds. Everlasting sorrow or happiness will follow. Surely, we hope to be like the wise women in the Bible who had oil in their lamps, who rejoiced when the bridegroom arrived.

**Kamolini Martin has been hostess *par excellence*, opening her home to North American visitors to Dhamtari. She also helped coordinate meal planning and preparation for the Mennonite World Conference held in Calcutta.**





**"My friend Warsha Rani Stephen, who is devoted to her family and to being a Christian, does not fully fit this stereotype."**

by Fern Gerber

## Expanded boundaries

Typically, Indian Mennonite women find fulfillment in homemaking and caring for their families. Those employed outside the home often work as secretaries, teachers, nurses and, in a few cases, doctors. Those who live in rural areas work in the fields, planting and harvesting alongside their men. Although loyal to their churches, they assume limited roles—teaching children's classes or working with other women. Culturally conditioned, they defer to men in the home, church and virtually all other settings. My friend Warsha, who is devoted to her family and to being a Christian, does not fully fit this stereotype. In her own gentle yet strong way, she expands the boundaries of tradition and expectation.

Dark-haired, dark-eyed and in her mid-30s, Warsha Rani Stephen is in many ways a typical, middle-class, Indian Mennonite woman. She often appears in a colorful silk sari or fine *salwar kameeze*. A fourth generation Christian, Warsha grew up in rural Madhya Pradesh in the General Conference Mennonite Mission area of Jagdeeshpur. Her values were shaped within the traditions and teachings of the Bethel Mennonite Church.

Warsha loved to learn. She earned a master's degree in zoology and taught briefly at the Bilai Government College before five years at the Beacon English School in Korba. Warsha and her husband, Anand, an engineer, grew up knowing each other. However, their marriage was traditionally arranged, with no dating. They have two daughters, Akanksha, 12, and Garima, 10. With their marriage and home centered on Christ's teachings, church attendance and participation are important.

In other aspects, Warsha's life differs from her Mennonite sisters. Following the family's move to Calcutta in 1998, she left her teaching career to enter the competitive world of business. She became the assistant manager of the ISPCK (Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowl-

edge) Bookstore, a respected Christian publishing house. The bookshop, located on one of the busiest streets of Calcutta, has gained new visibility under Warsha's energetic, innovative leadership. Traffic through the shop as well as sales have increased significantly. She hopes that the bookshop will be a resource for spiritual nurture among Christians in Calcutta and an avenue for sharing Christian values with others. An avid reader and writer, Warsha's interest in the world of books and authors comes naturally. She published her first article at age 13.

Warsha's transition into the world of business brought some stress. She had to master new areas of knowledge—bookkeeping, credits and debits, profits and losses. She values Anand's shared business knowledge and encouragement. Warsha also acknowledges her struggle to balance career, husband, daughters, church and community. "At the end of the day, I want to be able to congratulate myself and say, 'Well done.'" Unlike many Indian women who work outside the home, Warsha does not hire a household worker. Family members share cleaning, cooking and shopping tasks.

Warsha's role models stem from her past. Her mother adhered to societal norms such as giving more importance and attention to her two sons than to Warsha, but she also withstood obstacles to earn a master's degree and became vice principal at Janssen Memorial High School. While Warsha remembers stressful times, she deeply values her mother's love of learning and her "fighting spirit." The other influential woman in Warsha's youth—Helen Stephen—later became her mother-in-law. "She was the main person in our church who instilled good moral and religious teaching in many students, and continues to do so. She has all the qualities of a good Christian woman who is fully dedicated to her family, her church and her community. She is soft, gentle and loving. She believes in peace and forgiveness."

Yet, Warsha knows about Helen's concerns for her daughter-in-law's modern ways. Early on, Helen watched in dismay as Warsha called Anand by his first name, as Anand served himself and shared household tasks. To her credit, Helen trusts Warsha and Anand's nontraditional relationship, including their efforts at mutual decision-making and parenting. Intent on creating a close-knit

**"Aware of gender disparity in leadership opportunity, Warsha believes that discrimination has no place among God's children within the church."**

**"God's presence and action expresses itself throughout the ages in all cultures. The diverse human family of faiths holds many common beliefs and values."**

family, Warsha wants Akanksha and Garima to confide as freely in Anand as in her. As parents, they keenly realize the challenges of instilling Christian values within Calcutta's pluralist atmosphere.

Warsha's opinions about church life also differ from current Indian Mennonite practice. Aware of gender disparity in leadership opportunity, Warsha believes that discrimination has no place among God's children within the church. "The church will be more fruitful when Deborah, Ruth and Esther are free to exercise their gifts," she says. Asked about hopes for her daughters as they become adult church members, Warsha's eloquent response conveys the pain she has known as a female in the church. "I hope that one day I will have the blessing of seeing my daughters be their natural selves in a congregation, where their suggestions and opinions will be valued, and where they will be given their right share of [God's] inheritance." She hopes that they'll be known as God's children, without boundaries.

I feel privileged to know Warsha as my friend. I trust her as an excellent role model for Indian Mennonite girls who aspire to nontraditional careers and lifestyles.

**Fern Gerber lives in Calcutta, India, where she serves as co-country representative for MCC India. Prior to her MCC term, she taught for 11 years at Bethel College in the Department of Nursing.**



by Bonnie King

## Reflections

Since returning from overseas (nine years in India and five in Kenya), I often reflect on the personal impact of that experience. As accompanying spouse and mother, I resembled the majority of other international women, as well as Indian women. The wisdom, strength and caring that we shared across cultures fed my spirit. I continue to receive the fruition with wonderment and appreciation.

Through family, church and Goshen College faculty, I had become aware of the world's diverse peoples, their customs and cultures. Although not assigned by a church mission agency, my family and I went to India convinced that through our work and presence we represented Christianity. With no prescribed job description, I encountered others, free to learn about their traditions, while enjoying time to ponder.

With enthusiasm and careless disregard for the stresses that lay ahead, I welcomed the chance to live with my family in India. My husband, Stan, researched local cereal crops, and our sons attended school. Stories from Stan's happy childhood and youthful escapades, as part of a missionary (MC) family in India, beckoned us to add this dimension to our sons' lives. In the midst of frustrations and fascination, I gained from friendships and unique experiences.

Gifts of insight came as Hindu, Muslim, Jain and Parsi women lived their faith. To them I owe profound gratitude. During the first year of re-entry into life in middle America, lines of the hymn "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy" recurred: "But we make God's love too narrow by false limits of our own . . . /For the love of God is broader than the measures of the mind. . . ." Reminded of the inclusive nature of religious experience, I had learned a lesson. God's presence and action expresses itself throughout the ages in all cultures. The diverse human family of faiths holds many common beliefs and values.

Commonalties came to light in our home in Hyderabad. Nagamma and Narsimah worked as housekeepers and kitchen helpers, one a Christian and the other Hindu.

**"As I observed details of the lives and customs of Muslims and Hindus as well as Christians, sacred expressions from varied religious practices revealed an integrity that I cannot deny."**

Through language barriers and cultural or socioeconomic differences, we learned each other's patterns. My admiration grew for Nagamma's and Narsimah's great strength in times of personal hardship as they worked to support families within limited societal roles. As an employer, I repeatedly assessed my intent to practice social justice in light of overwhelming poverty and need. In the midst of difficulty, they presented a dignified acceptance of reality and strength to face each new day. They found humor and joy just as I did. Their examples of warm, generous hospitality in humble homes set a high standard for me.

During our last years in India, a small settlement of tribal stone cutters lived across the street. From early morning to evening, men, women and children rhythmically chipped the rocky outcrop. When at home (tents made of straw mats), they cooked and laundered outside. Their congenial voices and smiles attested to strength of spirit and community, despite poverty.

Some nearby neighbor women—stay-at-home mothers and grandmothers—lived in extended family situations. Others lived as nuclear families, their relatives living elsewhere in India. These women and those I learned to know in the International Women's Club had completed secondary school. Many had baccalaureate and advanced degrees. We shared interests of household activities; family, educational and health needs; being in touch with our parents; hosting guests; keeping a social calendar; and current events, local and worldwide. Citing mutual problems led to expressions of care and to brainstorming solutions with each other.

Many neighbors, devout in the practice of their Hindu faith, performed rituals of morning prayers. When scheduling a morning event, the priority given to daily rituals often tested my patience. Reflecting now, I wonder if the serenity evidenced in their eyes and voices resulted from a life of devotion.

Distinct in dress as are Amish women, a Muslim woman's head-to-toe *burka* sets her apart in public. As neighbors, we still chatted across the bougainvillea hedge. As friends, of whatever traditional customs, we met in homes and learned to know each other, affirming common ground and divine-human kinship.

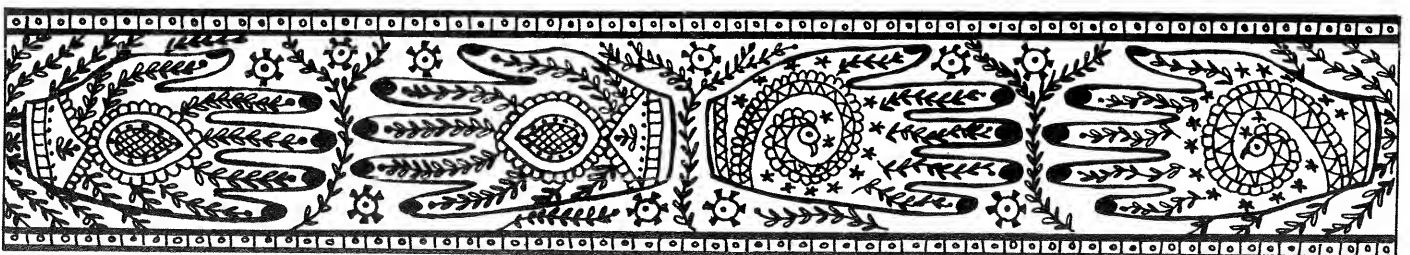
As I consider my cross-cultural experiences, I search for words to express the truth of human encounter with God through a culture with energy and longevity such as India's. As I observed details of the lives and customs of Muslims and Hindus as well as Christians, sacred expressions from varied religious practices revealed an integrity that I cannot deny. On recently reading *God-Mystery-Diversity* by Gordon Kaufman, a Mennonite theologian acquainted with India, I found words for the truth I knew.

Kaufman suggests approaching religious truth through conversation. Doing so, we may find that the exchange develops a life of its own and moves in directions not anticipated, which leads to new insight. He writes, "Thus, conversation is itself sometimes the matrix of significant creativity in human life."

Reflecting, I know that acquaintances developed into friendships after hours of conversation. Conversation happened in book discussion groups, sewing mornings, International Women's Club meetings and social events.

From international women and Indian women of diverse cultures, I learned how to meet the needs of our family. Together, we explored many local sights. And in the doing, serendipity! The fabric of my life glittered like mirrored Indian skirts. May you too know unexpected surprise.

**Bonnie King's approach to life can best be described by the quote, "Think globally, act locally." In addition to her many other interests, she coordinates the MYF Sunday morning hour at College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.**



compiled and annotated by Dorothy Yoder Nyce

## Recommended resources

*Note from compiler: This list of resources can only be partial, however representative.*

Bagh, Rachel. "Breaking Barriers in the Family, Eph. 5:21–25, Gen. 2:18–22," in *Envisioning a New Heaven and a New Earth*, Lalrinawmi Ralte, et al., eds. Delhi: National Christian Council of India, 1998, 89–94.

Berg, Nettie. "37 Years of Missionary Service in India," *Mennonite Observer*, August 1960.

Buckwalter, Leoda. *A Hybrid in America* (1998), *Confessions of a Hybrid: My Spiritual Journey* (1996), and *Manorma* (1991). Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House. These are three of Leoda Buckwalter's seven books. Leoda lived in India for over 50 years: 1) as a child; 2) with established and pioneer church work among tribal people in Bihar for 20 years; and 3) in missionary radio effort with the Indian arm of Far East Broadcasting for 20 years. Her book, *Manorma*, an account that reflects how she and many North American Anabaptists understood mission in the early years, focuses on whether a Hindu and Christian can be happily married. In *Confessions*, Leoda names the highs and lows of missionary life, like family good-byes. She translates what God says to her. She notes cultural-religious features from the red dot on women's foreheads to the Tulsi plant to legends and drumbeats. She struggles with "being on display" and contrasts time between East and West. A lesson learned: "Even in India, a woman under God has a part in kingdom building if she knows when to keep silent and forgives from her heart when her toes are trampled." *A Hybrid in America* deals with re-entry into life in the U.S., positive and negative. Leoda's basic issue as a missionary "What is needed to make my Christian witness credible right where I am?" applies to every believer.

Cummings, Mary Lou, ed. *Full Circle: Stories of Mennonite Women*. Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1988. Chapters from India report on Mathuria Bai, Dr. Ella Garber Bauman, Martha Burkhalter, Florence Coopridier Friesen, and Irene Funk. Writers with India experience are Helen Kornelsen and Ruth Unrau.

Flueckiger, Joyce Burkhalter. *Gender and Genre in the Folklore of Middle India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996. Author of professional articles based on research done in India—including a Muslim woman healer from Hyderabad—Joyce returned to villages close to her childhood for fieldwork on oral traditions of the Chhattisgarh region. Looking at the social setting of a song culture, "I gradually internalized the rhythms of village life that I had previously known only from a distance."

Goering, Gladys V. *Women in Search of Mission: A History of the General Conference Mennonite Women's Organization*. Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1980.

Jost, Esther. "Free to Serve: Katharina Schellenberg (1870–1945)," in *Women among the Brethren*, Katie Funk Wiebe, ed. Hillsboro, Kan.: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature, 1979, 82–94.

Loewen, Helen Harder. *Charity Paid*. Self-published, 1998. A Canadian MB, Helen arrived in India in 1946. Quotes include: "My dark thoughts came back to haunt me again. Would I be able to love these people? . . . Travel would be one of the most demanding aspects of my lifestyle. Fortunately, I adjusted easily to change . . . I never learned Mrs. Loh's expertise in winning souls. . . . To see a new country through your own cultural grid is vastly different from viewing it through the eyes of nationals. . . . I was very conscious that things were out of our control [while being evacuated from Hyderabad during Independence turmoil]. . . . It [1963 retreat, 60 village women] was the first attempt on a local level to meet the instructional needs of village women. They were not only recipients but became carriers to others."

Martens, Phyllis. *The Mustard Tree: The Story of Mennonite Brethren Missions*. Fresno, Cal.: Mennonite Brethren Boards of Christian Education and Missionary Service, 1971. While the first MB missionaries, Mr. and Mrs.

Abram Friesen, went from Russia in 1889 to work among Telegu-speaking people. The American MB mission sent Rev. and Mrs. N.N. Hiebert, Elizabeth Neufeld, and Anna Suderman in 1899. Prior to 1952, Katharina Schellenberg was the only MB physician sent. By 1910 there were 3000 church members, and by 1971, 20,000 lived at nine locations. Martens notes four steps of foreign mission effort: scatter the Word, teach converts, form the church, and entrust the church to God (leave).

Nikkel, Mary. *Conquest for Christ: A Study in Mennonite Brethren Missions*. Hillsboro, Kan.: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1961.

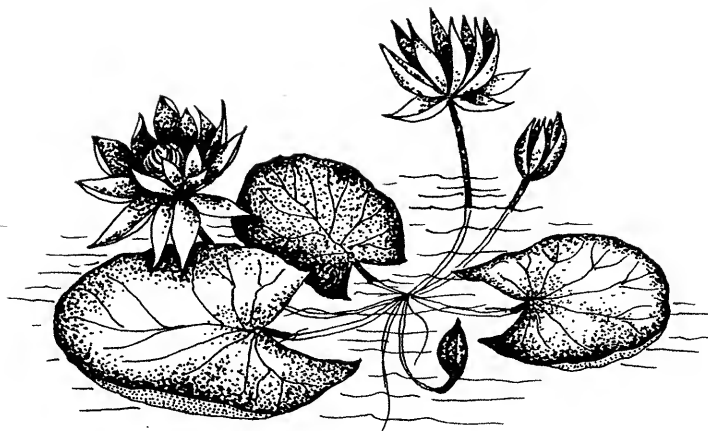
Nyce, Dorothy Yoder. "Interreligious Dialogue: Our Privilege and Responsibility," in *Mission Today: Challenges and Concerns*, Abraham P. Athyal and Dorothy Yoder Nyce, eds. Chennai, TN, India: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1998, 89-105.

Nyce, Dorothy Yoder. *Strength, Struggle and Solidarity: India's Women*. Goshen, Ind.: Pinchpenny Press, 1989.

Platt, LaVonne Godwin. *Bela Banerjee: Bringing Health to India's Villages*. Newton, Kan.: Wordsworth, 1988.

Platt, LaVonne Godwin. *In Memory of Bela Banerjee: a coda to her biography*. Newton, Kan.: Wordsworth, 1996.

Ratzlaff, Mrs. Harold (Ruth), ed. *Fellowship in the Gospel, India 1900-1950*. Newton, Kan.: Mennonite Publishing Office, 1950. Women contributors include Ruth Ratzlaff, Helen Nichel, Mathilda Penner, Martha Burkhalter, Hilda Dester, Auguste Schmidt, Elenore Schmidt, Ella Bauman, Vernelle Waltner, Eva Pauls and Adah Wenger. Nichel states: "It is very important that women receive training in Bible story-telling, in reading the Word of God to village women, in child care, in sewing, and in creating a Christian atmosphere in their homes." Early in mission endeavor, an Indian "woman's world was small and her interests were narrow . . . a contrast with today when women are willing to express themselves, to learn to be family" (Ratzlaff).



Rich, Elaine Sommers. "M.D.: Florence Coopridge Friesen," in *Mennonite Women: A Story of God's Faithfulness, 1683-1983*. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1983, 175-78. Rich refers

to a dozen other women missionaries involved in India, including Alice Yoder, one of the first American Mennonites. In 1897 she went with the Christian and Missionary Alliance group to work with orphans, 128-30).

Rodrigues, Shirley, compiler. *My Vision*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1986. Rodrigues was on MCC/Calcutta staff when this resource—40 creative, student expressions to celebrate the International Year of Peace—was published.

Roth, Lorraine. "Leona Murl Cressman," in *Willing Service: Stories of Ontario Mennonite Women*. Waterloo, Ont.: WMSC of Eastern Canada, 1992, 89-91.

Schmidt, Linda. "A Seventy-Seven Year Transition: The General Conference Mennonite Mission in India and the Bharatiya General Conference Mennonite Church, 1900-1977." Unpublished paper, History Dept., Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., May, 1977, 71 pp.

*Twenty-Five Years with God in India*. By India missionaries (General Conference), Semi-Jubilee Anniversary of Founding. Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1929.

Unrau, Ruth. *A Time to Bind and a Time to Loose: A history of the General Conference Mennonite church mission involvement in India from 1900-1995*. Newton, Kan.: Commission on Overseas Missions, 1996. Being a history, this resource reports "firsts": 1) first COM missionaries P.A. and Elizabeth Dickman Penner and John F. and Susanna Kroeker, 1900; 2) first church service in Champa, 1902. Other women noted include: 1) Dr. Theresa Alfred Patil "called by God" and graduate of Vellore Christian Medical College, age 25; 2) Irene Funk's death of acute leukemia and her immersion in the language—six years after arriving in India, she could read *The Brothers*

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns.

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*Karamazov* in Hindi; 3) Dr. Ella Bauman (with pharmacist Binod Kumar and MCC workers Menno and Savilla Diener) served several weeks at a camp for 250,000 refugees during Partition, "a drama of the most tragic of human events I have witnessed in my life."

Unrau, Ruth. *Encircled: Stories of Mennonite Women*. Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1986. "Saying Yes to Need," describes Caroline Banwar Theodore, an Indian Bengali who served as the first doctor in the Champa dispensary. "Intrepid Traveler and Teacher" highlights Emma Mary Ruth's musical gifts. "To India with Love"

portrays Christena Harder Duerksen. In "She Remembered Missions," Susanna Theresa Nickel Schroeder says, "I can truly say it was harder to give up going to India than it ever was to be willing to go."

Unrau, Ruth. *Hill Station Teacher: A Life with India in It*. Kidron, Ohio: Kidron Creek Publishing, 1997.

Wiebe, Viola Bergthold, and Marilyn Wiebe Dodge. *Sepia Prints: Memoirs of a Missionary in India*. Hillsboro, Kan: Kindred Press, 1990. Here is a creative, honest, sensitive memoir. Details from this finest of missionary resources appear in the *Report* lead article.

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